

Forest Legacy Project

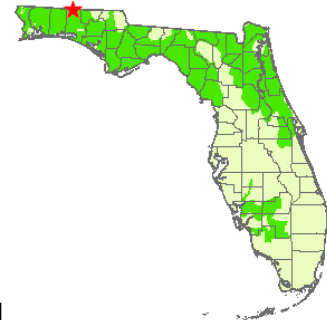
Keystone Longleaf Preserve

Walton County, Florida



FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2019 Forest Legacy Program Funding	\$2,300,000
FY 2019 Non-Federal Cost Share	\$1,450,000
FY 2019 Project Costs	\$3,750,000
FY 2019 Project Acres	2,220
Forest Legacy Funding To Date	\$0
Total Project Costs	\$3,750,000
Total Project Acres	2,220



★ Project Location
■ Forest Legacy Areas

Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Keystone	2,127	\$3,100,000	\$2,300,000	\$800,000	Proposed 2019
Spring	93	\$650,000	\$0	\$650,000	Proposed 2019

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Keystone Longleaf Preserve stands as one of the best remaining privately-managed sources of biodiversity and mature timber within the range of the longleaf ecosystem. With 2,220 acres of predominantly intact longleaf natural community, it is a model of longleaf management in the midst of North America's largest and most ambitious longleaf conservation effort. Groups including the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation envision a longleaf corridor over nearly a million acres connecting national forests in Alabama and Florida with state forests and private conservation lands. The preserve has never lost its longleaf canopy and, because of its exceptional diversity and intact longleaf communities, represents a superior seed bank for restoration efforts on other public and private lands. Threatened by the owners' need to sell land held for over half a century, a CONSERVATION EASEMENT on 2,127 acres (Keystone) will ensure it serves as a model of forest management while sheltering some of the state's rarest plants, wildlife and water resources, while FEE SIMPLE acquisition of the 93-acre cost-share tract (Spring) will facilitate restoration and public access to a natural limestone bridge formation and spring fed by the Floridan Aquifer.



Morning fog and the multi-aged class longleaf pine ecosystem of Keystone. (Photo by Beth Young)

PROJECT FEATURES

Important

- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS - TIMBER:** Keystone is enrolled in the Florida Forest Stewardship Program and managed pursuant to a certified forester's management plan for managing timber harvests while

preserving the ecological integrity of this intact longleaf pine landscape.

- Keystone supports the Pensacola region forest products industry that provides over 5,100 jobs and produces annual revenues exceeding \$1 billion by satisfying market demand with its sustainable harvests of high quality pole and saw timber.
- For decades, Keystone has been managed using a methodology that considers the health and beauty of the living longleaf pine forest while combining frequent prescribed fire, highly selective harvesting for sustainable management, and a commitment to woodland aesthetics.
- Managed with a frequent fire interval as a multi-aged longleaf forest with an intact understory, Keystone presents a sustainable resource of fine mature sawtimber, planking, poles, masts and other high grade and hard-to-find timbers sought by industry as well as boatwrights and other fine builders.
- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS - NON-TIMBER:** Keystone is a highly sought hunting preserve that is leased annually for \$28,320 for its burgeoning populations of deer, turkey and rabbit, and it offers some of the best remaining quail habitat in the region.
- **THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT:** Keystone advances the Florida Wildlife Action Plan by preserving habitat for multiple Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including the federally-listed Eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise, Florida pine snake and the Southeastern pocket gopher.
- Keystone advances strategies in the Bluenose Shiner Species Action Plan, a state threatened fish species (G4/S4), to establish conservation areas and implement best management practices since it contains the principle drainage for Natural Bridge Creek, a priority watershed.
- State-listed endangered species occurring on Keystone include the white-topped pitcher plant, Panhandle lily, and Florida flame azalea, and the state-threatened spoon-leaved sundew, blue-flowered butterwort, and the snowy orchid.
- Other species likely to occur on Keystone include the federally-endangered reticulated flatwoods salamander and state-special concern alligator snapping turtle, little blue heron and white ibis.
- **FISH, WILDLIFE, PLANTS, AND UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES:** Two-thirds of Keystone is naturally regenerated longleaf pine in multiple age classes, with a diverse, intact herbaceous groundcover rich in longleaf ecosystem grasses, including bluestems, wiregrasses, Indian grasses, dropseeds and others.
- Because of Keystone's exceptional diversity and intact longleaf communities, its forest condition allows excellent opportunities for mechanical or manual seed collection, representing a superior seed bank opportunity for restoration efforts elsewhere across the longleaf ecosystem range.
- Keystone has been on a two-year burn rotation for almost two decades, trending toward growing season burns that are more effective for hardwood control, understory diversity, longleaf regeneration and wildlife. Low fuel loads and fire breaks permit growing season burns on most of the property.
- Hillside seeps and pitcher plant bogs are common on Keystone and remain unplanted and fire managed, resulting in an open-canopy forest with extraordinary herbaceous diversity, including at least four species of pitcher plants and other rare carnivorous plants.
- **WATER SUPPLY, AQUATIC HABITAT AND WATERSHED PROTECTION:** Over 2.75 miles of Natural Bridge Creek, a sandy-bottomed seepage stream originating from the small springs and uplands of Keystone, winds over limestone outcrops before flowing into the upper Choctawhatchee River watershed.
- Keystone's well-drained soils provide high recharge to the Floridan Aquifer, the drinking water source for the Paxton wellfield only three miles away and one of the most productive aquifers in the world, and its conservation will protect the aquifer's vulnerability to groundwater contamination.
- The Spring tract contains Natural Bridge Rise, a second magnitude spring, together with a natural limestone bridge where Natural Bridge Creek disappears underground into a 30-foot karst window on



Azaleas along Natural Bridge Creek. (Photo by Beth Young)

the west side and then reappears from the 20-foot spring vent on east side of the formation.

- Public acquisition of Spring will allow the removal of Natural Bridge Road from the limestone natural bridge, and clearing of the debris and sedimentation from the road that impairs Natural Bridge Rise.
- PUBLIC ACCESS: Fee simple acquisition of Spring will only allow for public recreation at Natural Bridge Rise and the immediate surrounding longleaf forest.
- HISTORIC/CULTURAL: There are three historic buildings on site and the spring/natural bridge formation was used by both Native American and 19th century historic cultures, with evidence including arrowheads and pottery fragments, and the remains of a grist mill and turpentine still.

Threatened

- LACK OF PROTECTION: Walton County will allow the subdivision of Keystone into 212 residential units on lots as small as one-half acre in size.
- Walton County permits many agricultural, forestry and residential uses of Keystone. There are no local or state restrictions on the conversion of any of the property to more intensive forest or non-forest uses that would destroy the understory of this special, intact longleaf habitat.
- LAND AND LANDOWNER'S CIRCUMSTANCE: The family matriarch listed the project for sale for the first time since World War II to provide for her financial retirement needs rather than continuing her ownership interest in land located more than 500 miles from her home.
- The family obligations of the owner that has managed Keystone since the mid-1980s require that he divest ownership and responsibility for the property so that he can spend more time at his home in South Florida.
- Today, Keystone and Spring are listed with Verdura Properties, a Tallahassee based real estate broker specializing in marketing high-end timber and recreational properties to high net worth entities. The property is being marketed as a whole or as four separate tracts.
- As the family entertains purchase offers, protection of Keystone and Spring will continue the multi-aged longleaf management program that has been implemented for the better part of three decades, rather than the resulting conversion likely to occur with most interested buyers.
- ADJACENT LAND USE: Keystone is surrounded and bordered by increasing conversion of natural forests with native groundcover elements to intensive pine plantations with groundcover absent, or to farmland and rural residential development.
- ABILITY TO DEVELOP: Keystone contains more than 80% uplands with a unique creek amenity, stunning forest vistas and over ten miles of road frontage with electrical utilities, making residential development or agricultural conversion of the project very feasible and attractive.



Natural Bridge Rise flows to the surface east of the natural limestone bridge. (Photo by Keith Fountain)

Strategic

- CONSERVATION INITIATIVE: Located in the largest longleaf landscape defined by America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative, Keystone contributes to the 15-year goal to increase longleaf habitat to 8.0 million acres by protecting an intact longleaf natural community and providing a superior seed bank for restoration of public and private lands across the range of the ecosystem.
- Keystone's intact longleaf habitat supports the U.S. Forest Service International Program to address threats to the monarch butterfly across the range of its migration by maintaining habitat used by the monarch in its Southeast U.S. migration corridor.
- Keystone and Spring exemplify three goals of the America's Great Outdoors Initiative by supporting community-based recreational access to Natural Bridge Rise, conserving a rural working forest and

protecting the potable water supplied by the Floridan Aquifer

- Forest Legacy Program funding complements coalition efforts to protect a million-acre working longleaf landscape, while supporting local acquisition of Spring for restoration and recreation.
- CONSERVATION PLAN-STATE: The Florida Springs Initiative seeks to implement springs preservation by acquiring lands in the springshed to be left in its natural state. Protection of Spring advances this Governor-led initiative by acquiring the Natural Bridge Rise for restoration and protecting over 2,000 acres of the Natural Bridge Creek watershed and springshed recharge area.
- Keystone supports an initiative of the Northwest Florida Water Management District to maximize aquifer recharge through private landowner groundcover restoration. It protects an open longleaf woodland with intact groundcover and frequent fire in an area of high aquifer recharge and a public wellfield without the significant costs associated with groundcover restoration.
- Keystone supports Forest Action Plan elements related to enhancement of economic opportunities for landowners, particularly as related to uneven-aged management and premium timber products; maintenance of longleaf pine forests with intact ground cover; and protection of valuable working forests by preserving a single large tract of intact longleaf habitat while maintaining sustainable forestry.
- COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS: Keystone is six miles from Geneva State Forest and 12 miles from Conecuh National Forest, and linked to both public lands through more than 60,000 acres of private timberlands. Protection of Keystone can ultimately contribute to a continuous protected forest landscape with longleaf pine prevalent across more than a million acres of Alabama and Florida.



Increasingly, forests are being converted to farms and rural residential uses. (Photo by Keith Fountain)

Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	1
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	1
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	0
Mineral Determination	0
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	1
Readiness Total Tally Score	4

Supporting Parties

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Forest Service; Florida Department of Environmental Protection; Northwest Florida Water Management District; Conecuh National Forest; Walton County, Florida; Conservation Trust for Florida; Longleaf Alliance; The Conservation Fund; Nokuse Plantation; and Gulf Coast Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit.

For more information on the Forest Legacy Program, please contact:

Scott Stewart

*National Forest Legacy
Program Coordinator*
USDA Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue,
3SC
Washington, DC 20250
202-205-1618
sstewart@fs.fed.us

Michael W Murphy

*Forest Legacy Program
Coordinator*
USDA Forest Service
1720 Peachtree Road, NW
Suite 700
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-347-5214
mwmurphy@fs.fed.us

Catherine Ingram

Forest Legacy Coordinator
Florida Forest Service
3125 Conner Blvd.
Room DOJ 240
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1650
850-681-5827
Catherine.Ingram@freshfromflorida.com



